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Turnabout: Students Grade UD

11.06.2007 | Campus and Community, Students NSSE received national attention Nov. 5 from USA Today, which published stories and made public an online searchable database of NSSE benchmark scores from 257 schools, including the University of Dayton.

"We rank above the national average for research universities (with high research activity) in all five benchmark areas in the USA Today database: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experience and supportive campus environment," said Joseph Untener, associate provost for faculty and administrative affairs. "And we compare quite well relative to our peer institutions."

Untener said he is especially pleased with the positive results in areas that indicate the University is delivering on its Catholic-Marianist mission.

"Students reported a high level of engagement in those areas, such as community service, developing a personal code of values and ethics and deepening a sense of spirituality that we think indicates that the University is carrying out its core mission," Untener said.

UD's high scores on writing were highlighted by USA Today. Steve Wilhoit, professor of English and Learning Teaching Center Fellow, told the paper that a focus on writing can help students understanding high-level ideas.

"If students are struggling for precise language, then they're really struggling for precise thought," said Wilhoit. "Rewriting is rethinking, so they have to think again about, 'What is it that I mean? What is it that I've learned? What is the significance of this?'"

Wilhoit said UD students are likely to encounter a variety of writing assignments, no matter what academic field they choose. Faculty members from all disciplines participate in a 16-week workshop on how to teach writing and use it as a learning tool, he said.

"We move writing beyond the classroom, which is important for our learning-living environment," he said. "This summer, our Rivers Institute scholars canoed down the Great Miami River and were required to write about the trip. I was there at the riverside, teaching them how to write about their experience."

The University of Dayton has participated in the NSSE since 2004. The latest results are from the spring of 2007. Untener said first-year students and seniors are surveyed in order to better assess how their experiences change over time.

The University's NSSE results on the five benchmarks can be found on the USA Today Web site at USA Today NSSE database

Untener said UD's complete results are currently available on its own Web site to internal users, students, faculty and staff, and that plans are in the works to open the data to anyone in the next six months. Internal users with a UD password can access the results at <http://assessment.udayton.edu/nsse.htm>.

Approximately 1,000 schools participate in NSSE, but only 257, including the University of Dayton, agreed to make their data available to USA Today.

Untener said UD agreed to open the data to USA Today even before the University had seen the latest results because the public is calling for more openness from colleges and universities, and also because "UD has a great story to tell."